



A short history of the route
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Chairman of the Partnership

The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership is very proud to cover the route of the legendary Stockton and Darlington Railway, the first public railway to be empowered by Parliament to convey goods and passengers by steam traction in the country. The first train hauled by the iconic "Locomotion No1" ran on the 27th September 1825 from the Mason's Arms Public House at Shildon at the base of the rope hauled Brusselton Incline all the way to Stockton some 30 miles to the east. The S&DR's original route served the collieries of south west Durham by bringing coal in chaldron wagons to the coal staithes at Stockton. Indeed, coal was the life blood of the line until it was absorbed into the North Eastern Railway in 1863. It is not widely known but it is said that the S&DR was the most profitable British railway company before 1860.

Shildon, now the home of the National Railway Museum's sister museum appropriately named "Locomotion", was the hub of the S&DR system where the early railway pioneer Timothy Hackworth, the S&DR's locomotive superintendent, established the S&DR's works and his Soho Locomotive Works. One of the unsung heroes of the early railways, Timothy Hackworth strove to develop engines that were powerful, robust, reliable and safe. His "Royal George" six coupled engine of 1827 proved once and for all the supremacy of steam traction over horses, being twice as economical. Indeed, the six coupled goods engine became the most common type on Britain's railways in the years that followed. Amongst his other achievements he developed the blast pipe which enhanced the thermal efficiency of his locomotives, designed a spring safety valve and introduced the famous Hackworth "plug" wheels in order to reduce breakages which were all too common on early locomotives with spoked wheels. He entered his "Sans Pareil" locomotive in the Rainhill Trials of 1829. Whilst it did not win it was sold and continued to do sterling service for many years afterwards unlike "Rocket". He produced the very first steam locomotives for Russia and North America. The Locomotion museum includes many of the early buildings from the Hackworth era many of which are listed and are worth a visit.

Shildon is also the site of the former Shildon Wagon Works where over the years thousands of railway vehicles were built and repaired. It is now the Hackworth Industrial Estate

The BLCRP's western terminus is Bishop Auckland. A shadow of its former self, as it was once one of only a handful of large stations with a distinctive triangular layout, the current station is a short walk from the western terminus of the Weardale Railway appropriately named Bishop Auckland West. The WR operates a community service from Bishop Auckland to Stanhope whose trains are timed to co-incide with the normal regular service trains from

Darlington. At its height, Bishop Auckland had trains to Durham, Crook, Wearhead, Barnard Castle, Spennymoor as well as Darlington.

From Bishop Auckland the line heads to the south east on an embankment towards Shildon and passes through Shildon Tunnel opened in 1842 to provide much easier access by rail to the South West Durham coalfields and increase traffic rather than rely on rope hauled inclines powered by stationary engines. Once we have passed through Shildon station the line runs alongside Locomotion. The area on which it stands forms only part of what was at one time reputedly the largest marshalling yard in the world before the construction of the Chicago marshalling yard in the USA in 1927. Some 27 miles of sidings full of full and empty coal wagons must have been an impressive sight.

The line also follows the route of the pioneering NER Shildon to Newport overhead 1500 DC electric railway devised by Sir Vincent Raven the NER's Chief Mechanical Engineer which ran from Shildon to the coast along the Clarence Railway whose branch left the route of the S&DR at Simpasture Junction near the site of the newest station on the line – Newton Aycliffe built in 1978. The electric railway ran from 1915 to 1935 using a fleet of 12 powerful electric engines shedded at Shildon. No 13 of a different and more attractive design was destined to haul express trains up the East Coast Main Line from York to Newcastle but the scheme never went ahead following the amalgamation of the NER with the new London and North Eastern Railway in 1923. It is interesting to note that eventually the whole of the ECML was electrified decades later.

The former S&DR line then leads on to Heighington adjacent to Aycliffe Park the largest industrial estate in the North East Region after Team Valley at Gateshead. Here the station platforms are placed at either side of a level crossing. This staggered arrangement lessened the chances of the station being completely destroyed by enemy bombers during the Second World War when the fledgling industrial estate was an ordnance factory complex. It had the advantage of frequent foggy conditions to foil the Luftwaffe. Additional "secret" stations were built here during the War to ferry in workers from outlying areas by rail. The majority of these were women who got the nickname of the "Aycliffe Angels". Heighington's other claim to fame is that the crossing is the site where Locomotion was originally placed on the tracks prior to its inaugural run back in 1825. The original listed station building is now a public house but parts of the original station platform can still be seen from the train.

The line then continues towards Darlington and its first station at North Road now the site of the "Head of Steam Museum". The elegant listed station is one of the earliest stations in the world and the museum houses a fascinating array of railway artefacts. The station also has many interesting listed building from the railway age surrounding it including a former carriage shed which was used to build "Tornado". The line then continues onwards across Bonomi's Skerne Bridge made famous both in John Dobbin's fine painting of the opening of the railway in 1825 and more recently shown on the £5 Bank of

England Note. It joins the East Coast Main Line where the original S&DR crossed the main line on the level. Darlington Bank Top Station, another fine listed building, is but a few minutes away where the BLCRP service trains connect with trains serving the rest of the country.

